

Congress of the United States
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Washington, DC 20515-1602

Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development
Members' Day Testimony
Congressman Steve Watkins (KS-02)

Thank you to the Members of the Subcommittee for having this forum.

I am here today to direct your attention to Highway 69, a major route that extends through a large section of my Eastern Kansas district.

Entering Kansas in Cherokee County, US-69 stretches south to north along the Kansas-Missouri state border, providing regional access to our rural communities and the surrounding areas of Kansas City, Kansas.

As an engineer, it is very clear to me that US-69 is becoming increasingly hazardous due to the high amount of traffic on just two lanes. While traffic accidents must unfortunately be expected, the US-69 route in Kansas sees more than its fair share. The rate of congestion is snowballing to the point where crash rates are above statewide averages. A combination of a large stretch of two-lane road and three freeway corridors that all intersect along US-69 adds to the risks of a highway that is a mainstay within the state.

Beyond the visible wear and tear, Highway 69 itself is getting older and the foundations are beginning to crumble, and Kansas state officials are becoming increasingly concerned with the overall health of the roads. Although light preservation work has been done, further maintenance is needed to ensure that our highway is kept in excellent condition. The intense traffic, longer commute times, and high accident rates are resulting in a decreased quality of life for Kansans. The conditions of Highway 69 have become a daily concern, creating a ripple effect of inefficiency and increased economic barriers.

As the Subcommittee drafts their Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations bill, I respectfully ask that you include a request for the Department of Transportation to conduct a study on the safety of the Kansas Highway 69 stretch. The safety of America's highways is one of the most essential and valuable contributions we make to our districts. There is no doubt on the return of investment; proper safety plans and maintenance of our highways is a direct investment in American ingenuity and quality of life. Failing to do so results in slower economic growth, hazardous - even deadly - driving conditions, and a shortsighted outlook that will have a negative impact down the road.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about the necessity to improve Highway 69 in Kansas and I encourage you to lead the effort in rebuilding America's infrastructure.